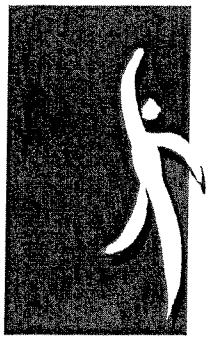

Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

STATEMENT OF REBECCA WEINSTEIN, JD, MSW, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MAINE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL

On the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Proposed Rulemaking
On Standards for Reduction of Mercury Emissions from Coal and Oil-Fired Electric Utility
Power Plants and the Use of Maximum Achievable Control Technology (MACT)
Published in the Federal Register on January 30, 2004 (69 FR 4692)
EPA Docket ID Nos. OAR-2002-0056 & A-92-55

Presented at the Public Hearing in Augusta, ME
March 1, 2004

Good afternoon, my name is Rebecca Weinstein and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council. The Council is an independent advocacy organization working toward systems change to assure that individuals with developmental disabilities are fully included, integrated and involved in their communities and the decisions impacting them.

It is not often the case that I have the opportunity to testify on environmental issues; until fairly recently, discussion of disability meant discussion of health and other human services. However, increasing knowledge of the potential role of environmental toxins and other factors in causing developmental disabilities means that a much broader spectrum of issues now must be considered as disability issues.

According to the federal definition, a developmental disability is a condition whish occurs before the age of 22, has severe impact in three major life areas and is likely to continue indefinitely. In most cases it is impossible to identify a direct cause of a developmental disability. The most current scientific research indicates that complex interactions between social environment, genetics, and environmental toxins such as lead, PCBs, and mercury play a profound role in the causation of developmental disabilities. While it is extremely difficult to have a measurable impact on social environments and genetic factors legislatively, emissions of these kinds of potent neurotoxins *can* be substantially reduced and even eliminated through stringent regulation.

Mercury can have a devastating impact on fetal brain development. Large exposures can cause mental retardation, gait and visual disturbances, and even small exposures can cause impairment in language, memory and attention. When fish contaminated with mercury are consumed, women of childbearing age can put their future children at risk for a range of developmental disabilities. Warnings are regularly issued to attempt to protect fetuses and young children from these effects, but even with this warning system in place, the Centers for Disease Control

139 State House Station Augusta, ME 04333-0139
Phone: 207-287-4213 / 1-800-244-3990 Voice & TTY / Fax: 207-287-8001
www.MaineDDC.org

estimate that 1 in 12 women of childbearing age in the U.S. has unsafe levels of mercury in her blood. Women who have become contaminated with enough mercury to cause substantial harm to a developing fetus may not themselves have, or show signs of, mercury poisoning. This is because the developing brain is especially sensitive to the effects of mercury, where its presence can cause significant disruption to a variety of processes including cellular function, protein synthesis, cell division, and cellular migration.

As an additional cause for concern, recent studies have shown that methylmercury in combination with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) act synergistically, raising questions about the impact of mercury in combination with other neurotoxins at very low levels. Many water systems in the US are contaminated with a variety of toxins including PCBs and other neurotoxicants, raising questions about analyses and alerts based solely on a single toxin.

The potential damage that mercury emissions pose to America's children make it imperative that mercury emissions be limited to the greatest extent possible. The more mercury that is prevented from entering the environment, the greater the chances that children will avoid its toxic impacts. Power plants have been allowed to emit these toxic chemicals for years, negatively impacting the health of our environment and the nation's children. It is simply unacceptable not to demand that these polluters meet anything but the most stringent emissions standards, especially when technologies already exist that can remove a large majority of these emissions.

I urge you to push for the most stringent standards possible to help protect America's children.

Thank you for your consideration,

Rebecca Weinstein, Esq, MSW
Executive Director